



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Park of
American Samoa

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National Park of American Samoa News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Humpback Whales Spotted in Ofu Unit of National Park

OFU ISLAND, American Samoa—Last Wednesday, National Park Ranger Carlo Caruso spotted a small group of humpback whales just over the reef crest in the Ofu unit of the national park. He described their movements by saying, “they spent about half an hour swimming back and forth at high speed, breaching, blowing, and pectoral fin slapping.”

During the peak months of September and October, humpback whales (*tafolā*) visit our balmy waters from Antarctica. They occur in small groups of adults or in mother-calf pairs. Humpbacks have been sighted around all seven of the islands in the territory, but their numbers are unknown. They migrate here to mate and give birth to their young.

Whales grow up to 50 feet long and weigh about 45 tons (which equals the combined weight of about 250 sumo wrestlers). They are air-breathing mammals that live their entire lives in the ocean. Their primary food is small schooling fishes and krill (small shrimp). They feed by gulping in tons of water in a single mouthful, and then strain the food out as they expel the water. The out-going water is filtered through specialized structures called “baleen,” which looks (with a little imagination) like a mouthful of coconut fronds. Humpbacks lack real teeth because they have no need to bite or chew their tiny food.

While humpback whale populations appear to be increasing in some areas of the world, those in Oceania are still considered to be endangered since being decimated by whalers in the 1800’s and 1900’s. By the time commercial whaling was stopped in 1966, 95% of the whales in Oceania had

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likely been killed. Their recovery has been unexpectedly slow, probably due to continued whaling by Soviet factory ships as late as 1972 and a subsistence harvest of these whales in Tonga up to 1978.

Because humpbacks use our waters to give birth to their young, it is important to protect them when they are here. Enjoy their presence, but don't pester them. Avoid the temptation to boat right up to them or follow them closely. Boaters, divers, and swimmers should stay at least 100 yards away, and watch from there.

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The National Park of American Samoa was established in 1988 to preserve the coral reefs, tropical rainforest, archeological and cultural resources, the habitat of fruit bats, and to provide educational opportunities for visitors and residents. National park lands and waters are leased from villages and the American Samoa Government through a long-term agreement with the National Park Service.

For more information about visiting the National Park of American Samoa, call 699-3982, email NPSA_Info@nps.gov, or go to www.nps.gov/npsa. Also, visit the national park's Facebook and Twitter pages.

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